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FREDERIC WARD PUTNAM¹

By A. L. KROEBER

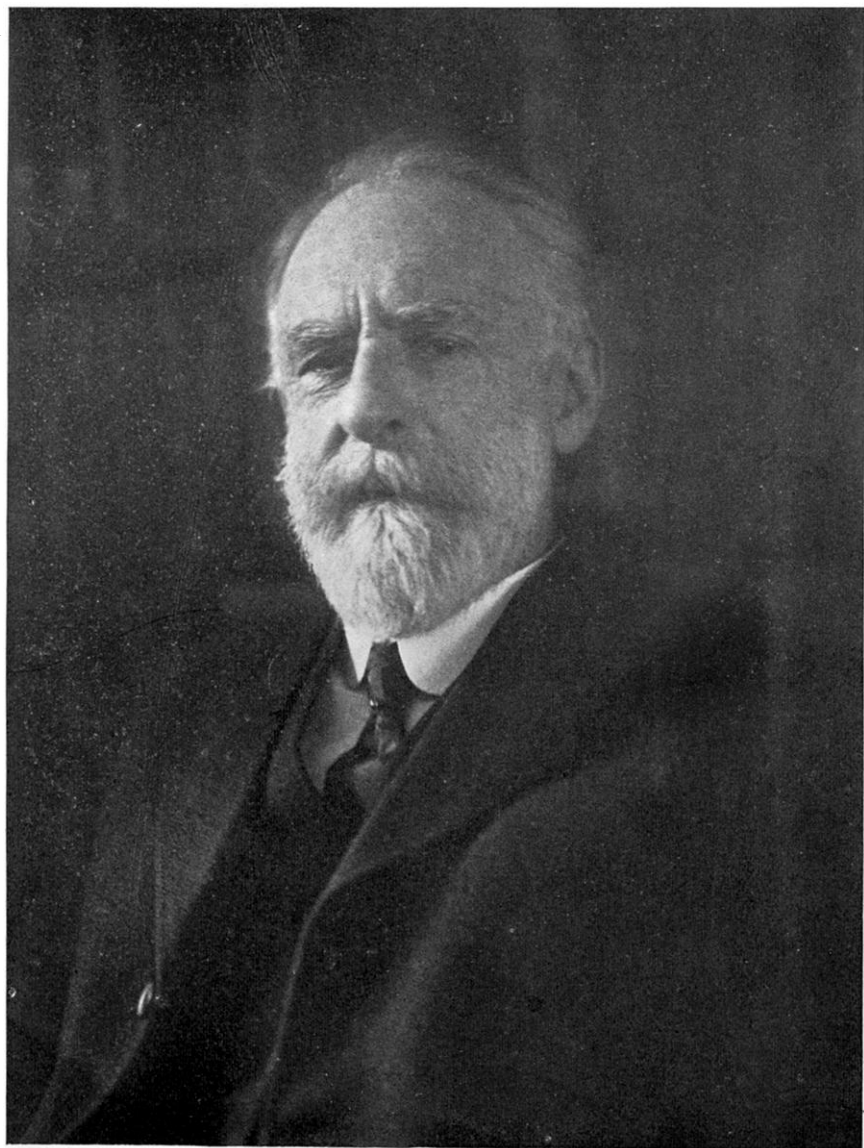
FREDERIC WARD PUTNAM, was born in Salem, Massachusetts, April 16, 1839, and died at Cambridge, in the same state, on August 14, 1915.

Professor Putnam was descended from a long line of Putnams, Appletons, Fiskes, Wards, Higginsons, and other New England families, some of which, as that whose name he bore, date back in Massachusetts to 1640, while all have been long established in America. He married in 1864 Adelaide Martha Edmands, to whom were born Eben Putnam, Alice Edmands Putnam, and Ethel Appleton Fiske Lewis. In 1882 he married Esther Orne Clark, who survives him.

From the earliest years of his education, which was divided between careful home tuition and private schooling, Frederic Ward Putnam evinced an unusual interest in the observation of nature. He assisted his father in the cultivation of plants, studied assiduously the birds within his range, and in 1856, at the age of sixteen, entered the ranks of writers in natural history with a published list of the birds of his home county. In the same year he began a remarkable career of nearly sixty years of tenure of scientific positions in museums and other institutions, with his appointment as Curator of Ornithology in the famous Essex Institute of his native town.

In 1856 he also entered Harvard, where he immediately fell under the spell of Agassiz, between whom and the youth a profound and loving intimacy sprang up, of which the latter's seven-year service as assistant to the master, from 1857 to 1864, was only an outward manifestation. To the last, Professor Putnam esteemed the influence of the great naturalist upon himself as of the deepest; and he never wearied of telling his own students, in a manner which

¹ See frontispiece.



Cordially Yours
J. W. Newman

could not fail to impress as well as to charm, the story of how his guide put him to work at his first problem.

There was more in this relationship than the influence of a mature mentality and character upon a developing one. Agassiz must have perceived, and at any rate encouraged, the special bent of mind toward direct, candid, and lucid observation of natural phenomena, unhampered by the technical modes of literary scholarship, that remained characteristic of Professor Putnam all his days and was perhaps his highest virtue in the domain of science. Few men knew better than he how to make use of books; but few read so little of them for the sake of reading. His mind was restless for knowledge—not the knowledge of others, but that to be had directly from specimen, organism, or phenomenon. The obtaining of this knowledge was to him a source of never-ending satisfaction in itself. He recognized the value of the investigations of others and made full employment of their results in correlating his work with the sciences which he pursued. But the impulse to his studies came wholly from within; he stood on his own ground, and not on the shoulders of others. He was early and remained to the last a natural historian, in the highest and dignifiedly old-fashioned sense of that word.

Under the association with Agassiz he soon drifted from ornithology into ichthyology, though his interests were always too living to become specialized in one secluded field. His studies at Harvard were irregular, self-directed, and therefore the more fruitful. His progress in achievement in these early days is shown by the fact that at an age where most boys are going through the routine of courses in trigonometry and examinations in Latin, or hesitatingly deciding the choice of a career, he was not only doing the work he loved but making contributions to the records of the science of life, and filling incumbencies in institutions of standing. From 1864 to 1866 he was Curator of Vertebrates, and from 1869 to 1873 Director of the Museum in the Essex Institute; from 1859 to 1868, Curator of Ichthyology at the Boston Society of Natural History; from 1867 to 1869, Superintendent of the Museum of the East Indian Marine Society. Beginning with 1869, he filled for four

years the same office at the Peabody Academy of Sciences. He was State Commissioner of Fish and Game for Massachusetts from 1882 to 1889, Assistant in the Kentucky Geological Survey during 1874, and Assistant to the United States Engineers in the Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian from 1876 to 1879. From 1876 to 1878 he was Assistant in Ichthyology in the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy of Harvard University. It is significant that most of these positions were held by him in an honorary capacity.

Two appointments which came to Professor Putnam about his thirty-fifth year, marked the entry of his activities into a new phase, characteristic of the middle period of his life. In 1873 he was elected permanent secretary of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. As the one fixed post in the ever rotating personnel of the great mother organization of American associations of learning, the policy of this secretaryship is perhaps even more deeply influential upon the destiny of scientific endeavor in the New World than is generally recognized. Professor Putnam held to this task, which is always arduous and often thankless, for twenty-five long years, in the course of which his quiet foresight and balance, as well as his unobtrusive native tact and kindness, were brought to bear on countless occasions. His duties led him into contact with thousands of colleagues who became as many well-wishers and often friends; and rendered him one of the best known of American men of science. In 1898 Professor Putnam laid down this burden, and was honored by the grateful Association with the highest gift in its bestowal, its presidency.

The second and even more determining appointment at the opening of this period was Professor Putnam's selection in 1875 as Curator of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University. This event signalled the recognition of his organizatory ability, and definitely decided a drift, which he had already begun to undergo, from the natural history of animals to that of man. The Peabody Museum was the first American institution specifically devoted to that science, or group of sciences, which subsequently came to be most generally known as anthropology; its name points to its early origin, and accentuates

the pioneering quality of Professor Putnam's work within and from within its walls. No greater tribute can be paid to his memory than to recall that, self-educated as he was, he broke athwart the classical and scholarly tradition of his day, in the greatest and oldest center of this tradition; and that he did so only as the result of persistent endeavor, and with repute, esteem, and the gain of affection. After eleven years, the Peabody Professorship—again the first in its field—was added to the Peabody Curatorship, and from this time on the steady development of a department of university instruction in anthropology was joined to the enlargement and perfection of the museum.

His endeavors in the latter direction seem to have continued to lie nearest of all to Professor Putnam's heart. No one can inspect the Peabody Museum without sensing something of the devotion and love that he lavished upon it for forty years. There are larger collections and more sumptuously housed and displayed ones even in America; there is none that specimen for specimen is of so high an order, in which quality tells so consistently, and that makes so unmistakable an impression of well-rounded care and completeness. It was one of the deep satisfactions of Professor Putnam's life, and an unalloyed cause of gratification to his friends, that he was able, only two years before his death, to arrange the ceremony of ground-breaking for the completing wing of the edifice in which and for which he had labored so unremittingly.

The final stage and fruition of at least the outward manifestations of Professor Putnam's career commenced with the great Chicago Fair, the "World's Columbian Exposition," as Chief of whose Department of Ethnology he served from 1891 to 1894. As in its whole spiritual effect on American life, so the influence of this exposition upon American anthropology, under the guidance of Professor Putnam, was so profound as to have served ever since as a point from which one dates. Collections were assembled from all parts of the world and housed in a building which for the first time bore over its portal the name of the science. The studies prosecuted enlisted young men whose careers were determined for all time. And—this directly and in the beginning solely at the

instigation of Professor Putnam—the foundations were broadly and substantially laid for one of the great museums of America.

Scarcely, however, were the steps taken which were to assure this reality, when Professor Putnam was called away to a no less important task, the organization of an anthropological department—a division, it might more properly have been called from its broad scope—in the American Museum of Natural History, in New York. From 1894 to 1903, while never ceasing from his work at Harvard, he was able to devote enough time to this new undertaking, as Curator of Anthropology, to assemble a conspicuous staff, to double the collections, to set into movement a series of explorations, researches, and publications, and above all, to plan and shape all these accomplishments into a flexible organic system which has proved its merit by remaining the scheme of the anthropological activities of the institution to the present day.

This labor, in turn, Professor Putnam resigned to undertake a like but newer one, upon the same terms of joint service to Harvard University, on the farther shore of our country. In 1903 he became the first Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Anthropological Museum of the University of California. He was then sixty-four years of age; but in spite of the handicap of remoteness during a large part of each year, he threw into his Californian service all the habitual vigor and unremitting care of his youth, plus the seasoning of his mature experience. The writing of his hand remains in the broad outlines of this institution as visibly as in those on which he had fashioned before. In spite of ill health in which there became manifest before long the first symptoms of the disease to which he was ultimately to succumb, he continued to the utmost of his strength his activities in California, until his retirement at the statutory age of seventy in 1909.

Professor Putnam's writings number more than four hundred, as they appear in the bibliography added to the volume issued in his honor in 1909 on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. These publications are about equally divided between those devoted to natural history, to archeology, and to scientific administration. The range of his archeological work, which in most cases rested

upon his own explorations, is evidenced by reports upon shell-heaps in Maine and Massachusetts, mound builders' remains in Ohio and Wisconsin, aboriginally inhabited caves in Kentucky, the geological antiquity of man in New Jersey and California, and conventionalization in the ancient art of Panama, to mention only a few random samples. His largest work is the report entitled "Archaeology," forming Volume 7 of the Wheeler Geographical Survey, in which, with the assistance of numerous collaborators such as he characteristically encouraged, he inclusively reviewed the pre-history of California. After nearly forty years the book remains the broadest and most fundamental treatment of the subject.

His formal honors were too many to enumerate. He was a distinguished member, and frequently an officer, of probably all American national societies of general scientific character or devoted to the subjects of study which he pursued; and belonged also to innumerable local associations, academies, and historical societies, in all parts of the United States. His honorary and corresponding memberships in foreign learned bodies were scarcely less numerous, and extended from London to Florence, from Paris to Edinburgh, from Lima to Stockholm. He received the cross of the Legion of Honor from the Government of France, the Drexel Gold Medal from the University of Pennsylvania, and the degree of Sc. D. also from this University.

Professor Putnam's helpful influence on men, especially young men, at the outset of their scientific careers, was no less profound than his accomplishments for science through his upbuilding of institutions. He never encroached on their freedom, met even abnormalities of thought with patient tolerance, and if he requested heavy drafts of their time, he was always and instantly ready to reciprocate with equally generous measures of his own hours. Above all, he looked upon them as friends; they were human beings in need of encouragement and assistance, not mere thought machines to be perfected and turned adrift. Each and every one of his students he helped. Their existence for him did not end with their departure from the university or exploring camp. His most

valuable aid frequently began only then, and if occasionally the relationship thus established atrophied, instead of becoming warmer with the passage of years, the fault was never his and the regrets were on his side. It is no exaggeration to say that at least half of the anthropologists of the country today owe not only counsel but their first professional recognition to the influence of Professor Putnam. In the vast majority of cases they admitted and continued to appreciate this debt toward their Dean, whose hours in his later years were frequently cheered by visits that bore testimony to the unwavering friendship and respect of former pupils and assistants.

In all his relations with men, Professor Putnam showed the same high qualities of sincerity, helpfulness, and unassuming modesty, charged at all times with a genuine and practical benevolence. The humblest of those dependent upon him regarded him with affection; and it was precisely the qualities which on the one hand caused janitors and doorkeepers at institutions he had long left to mourn his death, which on the other accorded him the respect and the hearing of men of affairs and endowed him with an unvarying influence upon his boards of trustees.

In 1909, at the age of seventy, Professor Putnam became Professor Emeritus at both Harvard and California, and Honorary Curator in charge of the Peabody Museum, and in 1913, Honorary Director of the latter institution. He spent his so-called years of retirement in Cambridge, in fair health, full activity of mind, and well-earned comfort. The struggles of earlier days were behind him; his old students remained loyal; and in their company, that of his associates, and of his family, he lived out the full measure of his years. He left behind him friends, but not an enemy; he harmed no man and helped innumerable; he placed anthropology in America upon its present foundation; he fulfilled all his capacities; and he leaves a rare memory, not only as a scientist but as a man.